



Senate to Consider McConnell-Feinstein Legislation
Renewing Sanctions against Burma
June 24, 2004

Washington, DC – The U.S. Senate is set to consider a measure sponsored by Senators Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) that would renew economic sanctions against Burma.

The sanctions were first imposed by legislation Senators McConnell and Feinstein cosponsored last year, the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003. These sanctions are designed to encourage Burma to improve its record on democracy and human rights. A vote on the measure is expected later tonight.

Following is the prepared text of Senator Feinstein's statement:

"I rise today with my colleague from Kentucky, Senator McConnell, in support of the joint resolution renewing the sanctions against Burma. The House has overwhelmingly and in a bi-partisan manner passed this resolution, and I urge the Senate to do likewise.

Last year, in response to the continued lack of progress towards the restoration of a democratic government and a brazen attack against the motorcade of Nobel Peace Prize winner and National League of Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the United States took a firm stand on the side of human rights and democracy for the Burmese people by passing the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act and imposing a complete ban on Burmese imports.

One year later, Suu Ky remains under house arrest and the military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has failed to make 'substantial and measurable progress' towards a true dialogue on national reconciliation and recognition of the results of the 1990 parliamentary elections, decisively won by the NLD. As a result, the United States Senate has no choice but to support renewing the sanctions for another year.

Let me be clear: I do not believe sanctions are a panacea for every foreign policy dispute we have with another country. I have long supported the reform of our sanctions policy and, in my view, Congress should have the opportunity to revisit sanctions imposed on other countries on a case by case basis and in a timely fashion. I am co-sponsor of Senator Baucus' legislation to allow Congress to vote up or down on the sanctions imposed on Cuba for that very reason. It seems clear to me that forty years later, those sanctions have not achieved our foreign policy goals. Yet, under different circumstances and conditions, sanctions can be effective.

Burma, in my view, is such a case. One year is not a sufficient period of time to judge the sanctions effectiveness and there is reason to believe that the international community is coming together to put additional pressure on the military regime.

I was disappointed that the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) did not follow the United States' lead last year and impose tough sanctions on the military junta.

Nevertheless, the EU, for one, is beginning to realize that engagement with Rangoon has failed to achieve the desired results. Last week, the EU refused to include Burma in two lower-level meetings with ASEAN representatives and, in response to ASEAN's demand that all of its members be allowed to attend, the EU canceled the meetings.

Supporters of freedom and democracy in Burma should welcome this move and continue to urge our allies to put additional pressure on the military regime. There is also some positive movement within ASEAN itself, including in the country that sponsored Burma's entry into the Association and has supported 'non-interference' in domestic affairs of other members, Malaysia. Earlier this month, a group of parliamentarians – from the government and the opposition -- formed a committee to press for democracy in Burma. The group called on the SPDC to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and restore democratic government.

The parliamentary group stated: 'The caucus also calls upon the (Burma) government to respect ASEAN and international opinion and return to the mainstream of responsible international norms and behavior'.

Of course, we would all like to see ASEAN, the EU, and others to take additional steps to put pressure on Rangoon to respect human rights and restore democracy. But we must continue to take the lead. I believe that by passing this resolution and renewing the sanctions on imports from Burma for another year, we will enhance our leadership in this area and rally the international community to our cause. Now is not the time to weaken our resolve.

Some may argue that the sanctions do no harm to the members of the military junta and instead place additional hardships on the Burmese people. The military junta itself cynically suggested that the reason why human trafficking is a rampant problem in Burma – as cited in the latest State Department report – is due to the desperate economic conditions caused by the sanctions imposed by the United States.

Let us not forget that for over fifteen the military junta has brutalized its own citizens, engaged in numerous human rights abuses including rape, forced labor, and human trafficking of young boys and girls, and run the Burmese economy into the ground. And the consequences of the regime's repressive rule extend far beyond its borders. As Senator McConnell and I pointed out in an op-ed that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, the spread of narcotics, HIV/AIDS, and refugees across the region can be traced back to Rangoon.

As South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated earlier this year: 'To dismantle apartheid [in South Africa] took not only commitment, faith, and hard work, but also intense international pressure and sanctions. In Burma, the regime has ravaged the country, and the people, to fund its illegal rule. Governments and international institutions must move past symbolic gestures and cut the lifelines to Burma's military regime through well-implemented sanctions.'

We cannot say for certain these sanctions will work. But we can be certain that if we do nothing and allow these sanctions to expire, the military junta will strengthen its grip on power and the

day of Suu Kyi's release from house arrest and the re-birth of democracy in Burma will be put off further into the future.

We simply cannot afford to make that mistake and turn our backs on those who are looking to us for hope and inspiration. I urge my colleague to renew their support for freedom and democracy, Suu Kyi and Burmese people and support this resolution.”

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